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A
S E R M O N,

Preached in the PARISH CHURCH of
St. MARTIN, BIRMINGHAM,

On SUNDAY NOVEMBER 15, 1778,

OCCASIONED BY THE
DEATH of the Rev. JOHN PARSONS, A. M.
RECTOR of the said PARISH,

And one of His MAJESTY's JUSTICES of the PEACE for
the County of WARWICK;

Humbly Dedicated to his MEMORY as a Tribute of Respect,
By the Rev. WILLIAM TOY YOUNG, A. B. K
Scholar of Pembroke College, Oxford, and Curate to the DECEASED.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE PARISHIONERS.

BIRMINGHAM:

PRINTED BY J. BRIDGWATER,

AND MAY BE HAD OF

Messrs. CLAY and ROCK, Church-Wardens, New-Hall-Street; Messrs. PEARSON
and ROLLASON, and Mr. SWINNEY, Printers.

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S E R M O N

Preached in the PARISH CHURCH
of ST. MARTIN, BIRMINGHAM.

ON SUNDAY NOVEMBER 15, 1875.

OCCASIONED BY THE

DEATH of the Rev. JOSEPH PARSONS, A.M.



RECTOR of the PARISH.

Printed and Sold by the ALLEGSTY JUNCTIONS of the PRESS for
the Proprietor, the Company of WARWICK.

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W. R. M. & W. M.

PRINTED BY J. BRIDGWATER.

ALSO BY THE

ALLEGSTY JUNCTIONS of the PRESS, Birmingham, and
the Proprietor, the Company of WARWICK.

P R E F A C E.

THE publication of this Sermon entirely originates in the request of many respectable Parishioners, and of many other Persons, who were pleased to honour it with an audience. It is under the patronage of his *Friends*, that the author submits it to the Public, hoping *that* Public, who condescended, in some measure, to approve of it from the *Pulpit*, will extend their Indulgence so far as to countenance its appearance in *Print*.

P R E F A C E

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S E R M O N.

P S A L M xxxvii. Ver. 37.

*"I went by, and lo! he was gone: I sought him, but his place
could no where be found."*

PATHETIC indeed is this expression of the Psalmist, and admirably descriptive of the sudden and unexpected vicissitudes of Providence in the events of life and death.

There is something so nobly solemn in the meditation of our latter end; something to a virtuous mind so comfortable in the reflections upon eternity; that, while they fill the soul with a religious awe, they exalt it into rhapsody and joy.—Can there be a subject more useful, and at the same time, should there be a subject more transporting to human nature, than a contemplation of the joys of futurity?—Can there be a theme which should engage our attention more, than a due preparation for that tremendous period, "when our Redeemer shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: when the graves shall open, when the sea shall deliver up her dead," and when Nature itself shall be employed by Providence no more?—Whoever seriously considers the solemn approach of that hour, must feel his soul spurning the servile

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joys of earth, and panting with ardour and impatience to be transported to its native heaven.

Oh! would mankind but reflect on the immortality of their souls: would they only consider that hereafter, they must exist for ever in misery or bliss:—how different would be the conduct of their lives! how would Vice stand corrected! how would Infidelity, Atheism, and Blasphemy hide their diminished heads; and be names utterly unknown in the world!—But so thoughtless and inconsistent is our general conduct: so profligate and abandoned our morals: and so inviolable is our attachment to worldly pleasure and vanity, that Futurity is no object of our consideration. We reject the voice of Reason and Religion; scorn the great teacher Death, and seem totally to disregard every thing that tends to convince us of the certain arrival of that period, when Mortality, stript of all its pomp and grandeur, despoil'd of all its boasted honours, must appear before the throne of God.—

Are reflections like these, immaterial?—Is the certainty of a future judgment of no consequence to our present existence?—Is the final consummation of all things a subject of total indifference to men:—to beings so essentially concerned in it?—Surely the care of our souls must require an unwearied attention, an unremitted diligence to secure their eternal interest—“For what profiteth a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”

Happy indeed would it be for us, could we discard our fondness for the vanities of earth, “and set our affections on things above”—Death would then be disarmed of its sting:
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its terrors would be softened into joys, and its horrors into transports—The afflicted sufferer on the bed of sickness would smile at pain; would feel the comforts of an approving conscience within—would consider his calamities only as pleasing preparations for a glorious rest—and would behold, as it were, his departing spirit, borne on the wings of attendant seraphs to his God.

However inattentive and insensible the generality of mankind are to their own calamities and misfortunes; it is to be wished, that the frequent and distressing afflictions of others would convince them of the wisdom and necessity of reforming their lives, disregarding worldly concerns, and seriously meditating on their approaching dissolution.

“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?—behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.”—Ye thoughtless and inconsiderate, ye giddy and unfeeling, are the daily accidents of life, are the dreadful miseries of your fellow mortals, nothing to you?—Do the sudden and unexpected revolutions of Fate, make no impression upon you?—Survey the mansion of ungodliness; search the dungeon of despair;—there behold the irreligious, the profane, the voluptuous, the abandoned expiring sinner, stretched on the deserted couch, without a friend to close his eyes—just going to deliver up his soul.—Can the spectator behold the present excruciating condition of this forlorn, unpitied mortal, without horror?—Can he paint to himself the dreadful appearance he must hereafter make at the tribunal of judgment, without sincerely lamenting his fatal error, and being filled

with dread, for the ensuing fate which must inevitably attend his dissolute conduct and behaviour—Can human nature, I say, read no instructive lesson from this sad spectacle?—Yes—Reason, Prudence, and Virtue all admonish a desertion of worldly dependencies, and teach us to repose a confidence alone in the God of heaven.—

Survey the haunts of melancholy—cast thine eye upon the aged parent, bemoaning the son of his bosom, torn from him by the sudden hand of death—behold his paternal grief fixed motionless on the corpse, and in all the agony of woe, lamenting the fatal change—bemoaning his only comfort, his only pride, his hope, his joy.—

Turn on the other side, and read a lesson of mortality, as thou surveyest the good, the pious, the indulgent, the affectionate father expiring in the arms of a worthy and dutiful son.—Behold the youth transfixed with grief, catching the eye of his parent, as approaching dissolution dims the sight, speaking, as it were, a parting blessing on his child.

Survey the prince of earthly grandeur, nursed in the lap of fortune, cloathed in all the elegance of art, pampered with luxury and pleasure, surrounded with courtly sycophants, and seated on the throne of majesty—in this seeming favourite of happiness and security—behold the slave of death!

Turn to Nature's fairest form, doat on the charms of beauty, fix the enraptured eye on virgin innocence: See the bloom of youth, the paint of health, all conspiring to form a
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perfect picture—In this transporting image, behold the sister of corruption! the daughter of misery! the child of death!—Behold these scenes; the eye of Pity may shed a tear; the human breast will feel a natural sympathy and concern at beholding or reflecting upon such circumstances—but let not murmur repine, or astonishment surprize you—for these are the ordinances of heaven; they are the wise and unalterable decrees of that Being who is the Author of the world, the Governor of it, and who will hereafter be the Judge of it—To die is the unavoidable lot of humanity—“And no man may deliver his brother, or make agreement unto God for him—For we see that wise men also die and perish together; as well as the ignorant and foolish, and leave their riches for other”—

“The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow’r,
“And all that beauty, all that wealth e’er gave,
“Alike await th’ inevitable hour,
“The paths of glory lead but to the grave.”—

“I went by, and lo! he was gone: I sought him, but his place could no where be found.”—How doth this sentence convince us of the changeable state of mankind here on earth!—we bloom to-day, we wither to-morrow; one moment we seem to be the inheritors of life in all its luxury; we seem to be the minions of happiness in all its glories—the next perhaps, involves us in a labyrinth of woe—we become the prey of diseases, the sons of affliction, the subjects of sorrow, the servants of death.

Where then, in this vale of misery, can the journeying pilgrim rest his head?—where can he look for an asylum to receive

receive his weak, his feeble, his disordered nature?—Shall he ask the world to take pity on him?—Can he expect comfort in his affliction, from the sons of falsehood, cruelty and deceit?—No—the world cannot, the world will not alleviate his burthen, or solace the sorrows of his heart.

Must he rely on fortune for ease and comfort? her gifts are precarious, her favour inconstant, and her protection faithless, and infirm—Shall he court the enchantress Pleasure, to shelter him in the circle of gaiety and intemperance, from the storms of adversity?—She needs not homage to attain her; her specious charms will soon enough allure him to partake of them; her insidious smiles too easily attract the mind—She will pretend to give such opiate medicines to the desponding soul, as will charm every care, and lull every disquietude to rest.—joys indeed she can furnish that sparkle for the present; but “in the end they are bitterness and death.”—We may revel in her enjoyments here, fondly imagine ourselves the darlings of security and happiness under her auspices;—but most unhappily shall we be mistaken hereafter, when we find that all her assurances of bliss were but empty delusions; and that all her boasted honours must mingle in indiscriminate ruin—Here then we cannot rest; earth is no harbour for our souls; our pilot Reason must steer us to some happier coast.—This world cannot furnish us with materials for solid happiness: earthly things have no connection with heavenly: this world can have no commerce with the next, only as it is an introduction to future happiness, which, if properly employed and improved, must effectually tend to procure it.—So entirely discordant in their natures are temporal

poral and spiritual things, that if we love the one, we must despise the other: if we adhere to the one, we must reject the other: if we will be the followers of Mammon, we cannot be the disciples of the true God.

Our existence in this life is so entirely different from our existence in the next; that the one may be justly called a continual death, the other an everlasting life. The one is a scene perplexed with every calamity, the other is a state unfulfilled with any affliction: the one is the dreary abode of guilt and sin: the other the glorious mansion of purity and God.—Can this earthly tabernacle then be considered as the resting place, the sanctuary of beings formed for immortality? whose souls are composed of celestial matter: and who are intended for the “glorious inheritance of the saints in light?”—Can Virtue, can Religion, can Honesty and Honour, can Friendship, can qualities like these, can celestial qualities, be designed for ever to grovel on this transitory earthly stage?—Surely it cannot be; Virtue must scorn the base enjoyments of the world, Piety must leave the scenes of ungodliness; Religion cannot for ever be the mock of fools; Honesty and Honour cannot be prostituted in the courts of perfidy and iniquity; Friendship cannot brook the treachery, the deceit, the barbarity of earthly violation;—Man, in whose frame and constitution all these divine particles unite, cannot fix his home on earth; he is the child of heaven; and must take “his last seat in the habitations of the just,” in the regions of eternal bliss.

There seems to be no circumstance amidst the dispensations of Providence more distressing to human nature: and nothing

thing more strongly characteristic of the instability and uncertainty of life, than the sudden departure of good and worthy men. Their loss fills the mind with a sorrow and concern that is not easily comforted; while the visible hand of Providence impartially displayed in the death of these persons, evidently declares that no man can escape the grave.—This is a distress which seems naturally to arise in the breast of every social and humane individual at hearing of the decease of one, who was perhaps—the public Patriot, the general Friend.—But when the closer ties of kindred and affinity, the nearer connections of intimacy and friendship are interested in the loss—how does it become aggravated!—How exquisitely afflicting is it to be deprived of a real friend! of so rare and valuable a jewel in this world:—Few live to acquire this treasure: they feel not the loss of it—Few live deserving of it: they know not its worth.—But how are those to be pitied, who die unlamented, because they have lived deservedly unadmired! Humanity indeed weeps over their urn: but the tear of genuine concern bedews not their grave.—How different indeed the case with respect to those departed worthies, who have been useful in their generation, and who in their lives have, to the extent of their abilities, contributed to the mutual interests of private and public society.—

And here I flatter myself, that by the humane, the candid, the benevolent, the feeling part of this congregation, it will not be deemed impertinent, should I, for a while, suspend the present task and solicit a tear to the memory of our departed Friend.—Should I in the name of gratitude and respect ask the tributary sigh, to the manes of your deceased Pastor.—Delicate

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cate indeed is the office of praise; but pleasing the task of gratitude,—distressing indeed is it to recall the remembrance of the dead: tho' respectful the recollection of their merits.—My acquaintance with the deceased indeed was short; but not too short to convince me, that I have lost a Patron and a Friend.—It is with truth, and with the highest satisfaction I aver, that every day brought with it fresh instances of his friendship and esteem; and I believe (had not the Almighty thought proper to have called him) that time would have ripened acquaintance into affection. 'Tis with pleasure I recommend his example to those proud, penurious, unfeeling Dignitaries of the Church, who have no merit perhaps but their preferment to distinguish them, and have no other respect or regard for their inferior brethren, than to make them the slaves of their indolence, and the poor dependents of their avarice.—Our Pastor knew not this sordid greatness—his soul was a stranger to the mean, to the cruel distinctions of fortune: nor was there a sign of superiority in his profession, but his abilities, and the name. 'Tis with an heart-felt satisfaction I congratulate him on these eminent characteristics of a noble and generous mind.

Such was his real character—such was the whole tenor of his conduct to *him*, who had the pleasure of assisting him in the duties of his office—and who has now, no other friend, but what his own humble abilities, and *your* remembrance of his departed Patron, can recommend, or procure him.—His attention in the discharge of his duty, was serious, sincere, and devout: his notions of the God he worshipped were most awful: yet untainted with enthusiasm and superstition.—His admoni-

tions from the Pulpit were the voice of soberness and truth: nor was he aw'd or influenced in his profession by prejudice or party; what he uttered were the real dictates of his heart: and deceit, flattery and hypocrisy were strangers to his breast.

Do we change our view; and behold him at the seat of Justice?—There his diligence and assiduity for the good of society, was, I believe, unwearied: nor were food and rest preferred before the completion of his duty.—Was indiscretion or folly to be reprimanded?—Candor and Humanity directed his Tongue.—Was vice or villany to be corrected?—Justice succeeded: tho' Pity lamented the necessity of punishment.

Can we bear to turn the eye of concern to that habitation of distress where weeping widowhood laments his loss?—Do we wish to applaud his private character?—Ask his afflicted Relict, and she will tell you, that the affectionate husband, the tender guardian, the kind partaker of all her grief, alas! the comfort of her life is now no more.—Ask distress'd Merit, ask private Charity, whether they have not lost a Friend?—their complaints rous'd by arbitrary and future necessity will shew themselves to the world: and convince his enemies, that benevolence was not a feeling unknown to him.

Does the voice of slander wish to disturb his sleeping dust?—Let it be ask'd, Where is the man without his faults?—Had he his failings? Perfection is not the lot of Mortality.—Do resentment and revenge burn to molest his Urn? Let it be remembered, that the grave cancels every indictment: and that all hatred and animosity should be buried in the tomb.—Let it

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be farther remembered, that tho' the *dead* feel not the wounds of the tongue, the sensibility of their surviving friends, cannot but be wounded by every insult that is offered to their memory.—Here then let us close the scene.—For delicacy forbids what truth and sincerity would wish to utter.—But let us ever remember, that the real merits of few are known till their loss is felt; and that few of our services are sufficiently applauded, till the want of them teaches us their real utility.

Finally, my brethren, let the parting spirits of our friends breathe into our hearts a due consideration of Death, Judgment and Eternity.—Let the frequency of these scenes remind us of the mutability and uncertainty of our condition in this life—and whenever we cast the wandering eye upon the monuments of the dead, let us think how soon the same silent prison may entomb *our* remains.

As therefore, from their very frame, nature and constitution, all earthly things are changeable and unsubstantial: and as the only real worldly acquisition we can leave to posterity, is a good Name; let us be strenuous to obtain this best of treasures, which as it perpetuates our memory here, so is it a certain qualification for happiness hereafter.—Let us “have regard to our Name; for that shall continue with us above a thousand great treasures of gold: a good life hath but a few days, but a good name endureth for ever.”—Surely the approbation of wise and good men here must be an exalted satisfaction; but how must that satisfaction be increased, when we are convinced that it leads hereafter to the approbation of God, the Judge of all men—Are we oppressed with trouble,
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are we grieved with affliction? a self-conviction of being virtuous, is an antidote against every calamity—In this self-consciousness of Rectitude, the humble Christian resigns his life into the hands of Him who gave it—without a murmur—without a sigh.—As he laid on the bed of sickness, his pains were alleviated by the genial influence that *Virtue* bestows; and by the comforts that the recollection of a well-spent life must administer.—No doubts, no anxieties disturbed the composure and serenity of his soul; he had hitherto been the strict attendant, the religious votary of his God, and his God did not desert him in his last hour.—Comfortable indeed for the loss of friends, is the assurance, that they died *well*.—The *eye* naturally pours forth its flowing tribute of weeping and lamentation for them: yet the *heart* feels a transport in the conviction, that from their behaviour in this world, they will be “recompensed at the resurrection of the just”—Surely such an heavenly recompence, must far exceed all that human sorrow hath felt for them.—Oh! how glorious the reflection! how exalted the prospect of seeing our friends, when roused from their earthly slumber, placed at the right hand of God!—Let us not be “sorry then, as men without hope, for them that sleep in Christ: for they shall hereafter live with him.—If we are buried with Christ, we shall be raised up with him.—for we shall not all sleep: but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump.”—And God grant, that our actions in this life, may entitle us to hear and receive that comfortable invitation pronounced at that period, by the mouth of our Friend, our Saviour, and our God, “*Come, ye blessed children of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you, from the beginning of the world.*”



the end

